

# Moshe Rabbeinu: An Angel Amongst Men<sup>10</sup>

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*Simchat Torah* is arguably one of the happiest days of the Jewish calendar. It would seem to be incongruous, therefore, with the joy of the day, to be discussing issues of death and mourning. However, the central Torah reading of Simchat Torah, more specifically the final eight pesukim of Parshat VeZot Habracha, and thus, of the Torah itself, are a description of the death of (34:5-7), mourning for (8-9) and eulogy of (10-12), Moshe Rabbeinu. In fact, many of the piyyutim composed for the day of Simchat Torah are, in essence, *hespedim* for Moshe.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, reflections upon Moshe's death on Simchat Torah are quite appropriate. Historians refer to the time period that the Jews spent in the desert as the "Mosaic period", for after all, Moshe is the key element in the Torah's revelation and the ubiquitous protagonist of 4/5 of the Torah.<sup>12</sup> In fact, God Himself declares that the Torah will be known for eternity by Moshe's name, as *Torat Moshe*.<sup>13</sup> It is fitting that the text of the Torah should end with his death and in essence, by doing so, Moshe's personal narrative is tied to that of the Torah itself. The question, therefore, is *not* why Simchat Torah is an appropriate day to celebrate the life and mourn the death of our great liberator, leader and lawgiver. What is compelling, however, is the way in which the Torah, and the various canons of *aggadot* treat the personhood of Moshe.

## The Issue of Moshe's Celestial Status

By ending *chamisha chumshai Torah* with Moshe's death, the text strongly implies that the life and death of a single human being is the center or paradigm of the nation's revelatory experience

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<sup>11</sup> Hundreds of these piyyutim have been written across history and geography. One of the more renowned ones is the *piyut* written by Avraham Ibn Ezra, entitled "Ashrecha". It can be found in the Artscroll Sukkot machzor on page 1347. For a comprehensive compendium and analysis of these piyyutim, see Leon Weinberger's "The Death of Moses in the Synagogue Liturgy" (Brandeis University Ph.D, 1963)

<sup>12</sup> On a purely nominal level, his name appears over 600 times throughout Tanach. No other biblical figure has that much exposure, with the possible exception of King David. In addition, with Sefer Devarim, Moshe has more actual speaking time than any other figure in Tanach.

<sup>13</sup> Malachi 3:22, see Talmud Bavli, Masechet Shabbat 89a for the verse's background.

and relationship with God as a whole.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the Torah explicitly refers to Moshe's uniqueness in numerous places. Moshe had a prophetic status like no other,<sup>15</sup> he was able to experience the Heavenly spheres,<sup>16</sup> and somehow, his very physical existence was changed by that experience.<sup>17</sup> In fact, these descriptions hint to an almost transcendental image of Moshe, an elevation of a human being to a status that borders on metaphysical. Along these lines, the Rambam states in Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 7:6 regarding Moshe, that "His mind was [always] connected to God, and God's glory never left him at all; light emanated from his face, and he was holy like an angel."

On the other hand, the Tanach constantly refers to Moshe as *האיש משה*<sup>18</sup> and as *עבד ה'*.<sup>19</sup> These descriptions highlight his frailty; the first emphasizes that he is a human being and the latter, that he is a man who serves a greater power.<sup>20</sup> There are numerous examples which illustrate that Moshe also clearly views himself as a tool of Hashem. Moshe's speeches and prayers throughout the Torah leave no doubt that he is a mere emissary of the Creator and in no way acting on any sort of independent spiritual power. However, emissary status notwithstanding, this two-fold image of Moshe as, on the one hand, a Godly being, and on the other hand, clearly of flesh and blood, creates a theologically grey area; was Moshe more than human?<sup>21</sup>

The ambiguity surrounding Moshe's humanity is most especially apparent in the last eight pesukim of Devarim: on the one hand, Moshe the man clearly experiences death (verse 5), but on the other hand, his burial place is concealed from human knowledge and contact (v.6), which insinuates a divine sort of demise.<sup>22</sup> He is the paradigmatic mortal<sup>23</sup> in the fact that he dies at the age of 120 (v7), yet he is more than human in that his "eyes never dimmed nor his natural strength abated" (ibid) – an implication that Moshe didn't age. The miracles he accomplished in his lifetime and the occurrence of his death are tied, respectively, to the fact that "שלוהו ה'" and that they occurred "על פי ה'". These two phrases clearly tie all that Moshe accomplished to God's influence and decree. Yet he experienced God face-to-face,<sup>24</sup> which connotes a relationship with the *Ribono Shel Olam* that was certainly supra-human.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In fact, it would seem to be more appropriate to end the Torah with Moshe's blessings to the tribes in Devarim, Perek 33, as they are an inspirational tribute to the nation's individual strengths and communal unity (and include a distinct eye to the future).

<sup>15</sup> Devarim 34:10 *ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו ה' פנים אל פנים*

<sup>16</sup> Shemot 19:3

<sup>17</sup> Shemot 34:29 *ויהי ברדת משה מהר סיני ... קרן עור פניו בדברו אתו*

<sup>18</sup> Shemot 11:2, Devarim 33:1

<sup>19</sup> Devarim 34:5, Yehoshua 1:1 and 12, and 8:31

<sup>20</sup> Such as in our pesukim in 34:11.

<sup>21</sup> This is a tension or confusion that has the potential to lead to practical religious consequences. Perhaps the most telling example lies within the story of the Golden Calf. According to many commentators, the people were motivated to create the calf because without Moshe as God's stand-in, they could not imagine a relationship with God. Here, it is Moshe's enhanced prophetic leadership that allows them, mistaken as they were, to almost substitute him in their minds for a relationship with God. See Shemot 37:1 where the nation's request for a new **God** is necessary because **Moshe** is gone.

<sup>22</sup> In addition, the word "ויקבר" in the singular, as Rashi points out, signifies burial by the hands of God Himself.

<sup>23</sup> See Bereishit 6:3 – the mortality of man is described as "his years are 120".

<sup>24</sup> Devarim 34:10 *ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה אשר ידעו ה' פנים אל פנים*

Though the text of the Torah represents both aspects of Moshe, the *aggadot* take this “divine/human” tension within Moshe and intensely emphasize the incorporeal side of him, unabashedly raising him to an almost angelic, or celestial, rank. There is a well-known *midrash* that states that Moshe did not eat or drink for the full forty days that he spent in the heavenly court, as he took on the status of angels who have no bodily needs.<sup>26</sup> Along these lines, Moshe consistently interacts and argues with, often besting, the angels. For example, just as he struggled with the angels before they enable him to pass to give the Torah to Yisrael,<sup>27</sup> so too he defeats the Angel of Death when the angel comes to take his soul.<sup>28</sup> There is a powerful *midrash* that paints a picture of the angels all refusing to be involved in taking Moshe’s soul because they see him as their superior.<sup>29</sup> Even more spectacularly, there are *aggadot* that discuss the question of Moshe’s general immortality,<sup>30</sup> and how he lost his humanity when he ascended to Har Sinai,<sup>31</sup> and even how he had the status of “spouse” to the *Shechina*, allowing him to annul the vows of God and change His decree.<sup>32</sup> He is “larger than life” in his height of ten cubits<sup>33</sup> and in the fact that he was created from separate material than the rest of mankind.<sup>34</sup> There is much discussion of nature itself being subordinate to Moshe; the sun refuses to set on the day of his death, the dust refuses to cover his body and the heavens and earth themselves beg God to spare his life.<sup>35</sup> However ambiguous the Biblical text may be regarding Moshe’s status, the *aggadot* leave us with no doubt; Moshe was distinctly transcendental.

In his *Iggeret haNechamah* to the Jews of Fez,<sup>36</sup> R’ Maimon ben Joseph, the father of the Rambam, echoes these *aggadot*. He writes that upon Moshe’s death, his soul was “united with the angels on high and entered the body of an angel ... this was not something new for him

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<sup>25</sup> An interesting example of this tension is the term “איש האלקים”, which is often used to describe Moshe (Yehoshu 14:6, Ezra 3:2). On the one hand, man. On the other hand, one with an atypical relationship with the Divine.

<sup>26</sup> Shemot Rabbah 47:5. See also Shir haShirim Rabba 8:11 in which God argues with the angels about the logic of giving the Torah to humankind. God’s argument is that the Torah is meant for mortal man who eats and drinks. It is interesting, therefore, that for Moshe to ascend to the Heavens to bring the Torah down to mankind, he must, at least temporarily, almost lose his human status.

<sup>27</sup> Shabbat 88b

<sup>28</sup> Pesikhta De’rav Kahana S1:10, Sifre on Devarim 305, Bava Batra 17a and Midrash Petirat Moshe Rabbeinu

<sup>29</sup> Midrash Petirat Moshe Rabbeinu

<sup>30</sup> Sotah 13b - “Others declare that Moshe never died; it is written here, “So Moshe died *there* (*Devarim 34:5*)” and elsewhere it is written, “And he was *there* with the Lord (*Exodus 34:28*)”. As in the latter passage it means standing and ministering, so also in the former it means standing and ministering.” In other words, Moshe’s burial spot is unknown because he never died. Rather, he rose to Heaven to serve God as one of the ministering angels.

<sup>31</sup> Shemot Rabbah 28:1

<sup>32</sup> Pesikhta de’Rav Kahana S1:9

<sup>33</sup> Berachot 54b

<sup>34</sup> Zohar 21b

<sup>35</sup> Many of these *aggadot* have been incorporated into the piyyutim of Simchat Torah that eulogize Moshe’s death.

<sup>36</sup> In 1159, Maimon emigrated with his family to Fez, then under Almohad Muslim rulership. The letter was written as encouragement to the Jews of Fez who were not only under severe religious persecution, but were being persuaded that Islam was God’s substitute for Judaism and that Mohammed was God’s replacement for Moshe. Hence, the emphasis in the letter on Moshe’s exceptional and everlasting holiness.

because when he was still living in the body of a human being, he was active among the angels ...”<sup>37</sup>

While this is not the forum for a full-length discussion on the glaringly polemic issue of human beings having a divine status,<sup>38</sup> it is worthwhile to contemplate why it is that these sources accentuate Moshe’s holiness so emphatically. The Torah explicitly states that as a man, Moshe was the greatest prophet who ever lived. Are these *aggadot* simply using spiritual superlatives to confirm Moshe’s holiness as a leader and prophet? Or are the angelic descriptions of Moshe intended to add a substantive additional dimension to the image and personality of Moshe Rabbeinu?

## Of Angels and Prophets

To encounter this issue, we must contrast two concepts that at first blush, seem glaringly distinct; the prophet and the angel. The initial comparison seems obvious; they are both agents of God but one is a man of flesh and blood and the other is celestial. But at a deeper glance, neither of these assumptions is perfectly true. Let us deal firstly with the issue of their respective missions. True, they are both agents of God, but they function very differently in that capacity. The prophet experiences the words and “desires” of God and then communicates them to the people. (If and how the people change their actions as a result is the hoped for next step – but is independent of the job the prophet himself must do.) The prophet fulfills his duty by communicating the message. The angel’s mission, however, is only fulfilled when he accomplishes a set objective, when he achieves a definite practical outcome. Whether it’s the destruction of a city (the angel sent to destroy Sodom,) a punishment (the angel sent to afflict Avimelech for his kidnapping of Sarah,) the extrication of someone from a physically harmful situation (Daniel was protected from the lions by the angel Gavriel, as were Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah) or an actual “push” in a certain direction (Yosef was told by an angel to follow his brothers,) the angel has a “job” to get done. That is his purpose; he acts upon something.<sup>39</sup> As a *shaliach*, his job is to change something so that it creates a different reality. **He fulfills his mission only when that change occurs.** The prophet, on the other hand, cautions, cries, cajoles, and convinces, with the *hope* of effecting change, but whether or not that change occurs is then dependent on his audience; will they listen to God’s word or will they ignore it?

This essential difference can possibly explain Moshe’s elevation to “angel” in the *aggadah*. It is a reflection of the events and work of his lifetime and of how he fulfilled his mission as God’s agent. The people responded to his prophecy so well, the Torah and its mitzvot were practically incorporated into our lifestyle; we were transformed from a slave people to a Godly one **so effectively** that it’s **as if** Moshe acted as an angel; the practical outcomes of his work were readily apparent. Reality was changed.

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<sup>37</sup> Similar descriptions appear in Avot de’Rabi Natan 157 and Sotah 13b.

<sup>38</sup> It seems that R’ Maimon is trying to solve a theological difficulty (the struggle against Mohammed’s legitimacy) by referencing a theological enigma of our own – did Moshe have a status that was more than human?

<sup>39</sup> To highlight this, the famous statement that “One angel does not perform two missions” (Bereishit Rabbah 3:2), is a reflection of the idea that the ultimate identity of the angel is the fulfillment of the job that he has been charged with.

This can be understood on a deeper level when one takes into account the Rambam's definitions of the "angel" and the "prophet."<sup>40</sup> According to the Rambam, angels do not exist as celestial beings at all; they are incorporeal or "intelligences without matter."<sup>41</sup> More simply, an "angel" is the way in which we refer to the will of God to change something in this world. The term "מלאך" is essentially a metaphor for Divine Providence. When God sends forth a "force" to put His will into effect, that force is an "angel."<sup>42</sup> It is God's will, something incorporeal, taking place in and acting upon the world of nature and physicality. Compare this to the Rambam's definition of the prophet. A prophet is someone who achieves a level of intellectual and imaginative perfection that is so elevated, that he can begin to reach an "understanding" of God. In other words, a prophet is a man of flesh and blood, of the natural world, who is able to ascend to God and "touch" the heavens.<sup>43</sup> Herein lies the intrinsic similarity: **the angel and the prophet are both representative of a bridging of the gap between the Heavens and the Earth.** They differ on the point of departure. One is the Heavens itself reaching downward to change our earthly reality and one is a material human being who "touches" the Heavens.

The Rambam's definitions now become the key to our understanding of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe was the greatest prophet who ever lived.<sup>44</sup> The *aggadot* raise him to the status of an angel. By doing so, they are adding to his exalted prophetic status. What these *aggadot* are depicting for us is that in his journey to fulfill the role of prophet, he played into the role of an angel by effectively fulfilling a mission for God. After all, the corporeal world was forever changed by the nation he liberated, the Torah he introduced to them and the forty-year journey he led them on. **While the prophet is on a level in which he can offer the possibility of change; the angel is change itself. The prophet is the impetus for an act; the angel accomplishes the act itself. Moshe Rabbeinu was both.** The descriptions of Moshe as "angelic" are not mere accolades or just testaments to his status as a holy, righteous person.<sup>45</sup> They are a description of the very unique spiritual footprint he left on this physical world, on how the gap between heaven and earth was bridged in his time.

Rav Soloveitchik describes Moshe's personhood using a very similar analysis. In *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, in discussing the different classifications of prophets, he states that Moshe is unique in that he "... introduces a new motif into the God-man fellowship, namely that of *shelihut* - agency. He becomes the divine angel who acts on behalf of God and represents Him.

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<sup>40</sup> The Rambam discusses the nature of the prophet in Moreh Nevuchim II:32 and in Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 7.

<sup>41</sup> Moreh Nevuchim I:49 – angels can appear as physical forms in a vision, but they are not, in reality, physical beings. In the Moreh II:6, the Rambam elaborates on the idea of angels as Godly "forces", like the forces of nature, for example.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, the Rambam explains that images of angels "flying" or possessing wings, are allusions to a mission being set into motion or happening quickly. (Moreh Nevuchim 2:4)

<sup>43</sup> And is, therefore, able to help humanity to understand God's will.

<sup>44</sup> According to the Rambam in Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 7:6, part of Moshe's uniqueness as a prophet was in his ability to comprehend his prophecies not only while awake and with absolute clarity, but as if he was a "friend" or "confidant" of God; i.e. without fear and at any time.

<sup>45</sup> By the Rambam's definition of the angel as a force, and not a formed celestial being, they are certainly not theologically problematic descriptions either.

‘...and sent an angel, and brought us out of Egypt’ (Num. 20:16).<sup>46</sup> The angelic role - that is to say, the role of agent - of the charismatic personality was assigned for the first time to Moses....<sup>47 48</sup>

This helps us to more clearly understand the *seder hayom* of the Torah readings on *Simchat Torah*. We read the portion of *VeZot Habrachah* and then we loop back to the story of creation. What better way to celebrate the “angelic” accomplishments of Moshe Rabbeinu and his effect on this world, than to start again with the story of creation; the story of the beginning of physicality, of the natural world! *Maaseh Bereishit* is a story of raw material being created. In addition, it is the story of the separation of the heavens and the earth, for on the second day of creation "וַיִּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לְרִקְיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם מֵעַל לְרִקְיעַ". According to the Kli Yakar, both physically, and metaphorically, God created a gap between the physical world and the Heavenly spheres.<sup>49</sup> The Talmud in Shabbat 88b tells us that when Moshe “went up to the heavens to bring the Torah down,” Moshe acted as the agent who began to make that gap a bit more narrow. **He did so prophetically by reaching a level in which he could comprehend God and His will, and he did so angelically, by his ability to fulfill his mission of bringing God’s Presence down to our world.**<sup>50</sup> Interestingly enough, *Bereishit Rabbah* 1:3 tells us that on the second day of creation, the angels were created as well. In other words, on the same day that God separated between heaven and earth, He also created the “agents” that would reach down to connect the two.

In Sefer Devarim, Moshe tells B’nei Yisrael the following:

**11** For this commandment which I command you on this day, it is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. **12** It is not in heaven, that you should say: 'Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' **13**

(יא) כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום לא נפלאה הוא ממך ולא רחקה הוא: (יב) לא בשמים הוא לאמר מי יעלה לנו השמימה ויקחה לנו וישמענו

<sup>46</sup> In translating this use of the term “angel” as a reference to Moshe, the Rav is echoing the Abarbanel, as well as various other commentators.

<sup>47</sup> “*The Emergence of Ethical Man*”, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, ed: Michael Berger, KTAV Publishing House, Inc. Jersey City 2005, p183-184. The Rav goes on to compare Moshe to Avraham Avinu, explaining that Avraham may have discovered an intimacy with God but that “whatever he preached he did on his own. He never represented God as his emissary.”

<sup>48</sup> Note the polemic footnote on p184 - “Christianity could not solve the meaning of divine agency and converted God’s apostle into a deity. We, however, refused to do so. Moses remained a human figure in all his idiosyncrasies. The angelic task is human through and through.” This footnote is directly in line with the Rambam’s view of Moshe as well; Moshe never transcends his human body. He is unique in that he uses his humanity to forge a more powerful relationship between God and His people.

<sup>49</sup> It is for this reason that the command to create the *רקיע* to separate heaven and earth is not followed by its fulfillment (יהי רקיע...ויהי רקיע) in the same way that the creation of light was followed by its fulfillment. The Kli Yakar explains that the events of day two did not occur immediately upon God’s command because “אין פתגם הרעה” - “נעשה מהרה” - Statements or commands that contain negative consequence (i.e. the separation of the heavens from the earth), do not happen expeditiously.

<sup>50</sup> In fact, Moshe is credited completely with the completion of the *Mishkan* (rather than its architect, Bezalel ben Uri) because it was through his efforts and merit that the *Shechinah* could dwell within the *Mishkan*. See Bamidbar 7:1 – “וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם כִּלּוֹת מֹשֶׁה לְהַקִּים אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן” : “And it was on the day that Moshe finished erecting the *Mishkan*...”. See *Pesikta De’Rav Kahana* for this interpretation of this attribution.

Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?' **14** But the word is very close to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it.

**Devarim 30:11-14**

אתה ונעשנה: (יג) ולא מעבר לים הוא  
לאמר מי יעבר לנו אל עבר הים ויקחה  
לנו וישמענו אתה ונעשנה: (יד) כי  
קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך  
לעשותו:  
**דברים פרק ל**

In the weeks before his death, Moshe encourages his people to continue in his prophetic and angelic path, to endeavor to close that gap, and not to see the heavens as something distant and unattainable. Corporeal nature can become divine; Torah can descend upon the earth. The last two *pesukim* of the Torah, Devarim 34: 11-12, are a testament to the man who was able to do just that, who was “הַשְׁמִימָה יַעֲלֶה לָנוּ”, who reached the Heavens and brought it down to us... and then we turn back the pages to where it all began, to remind ourselves that we must continue to accomplish God’s mission for us, by putting His will into effect on the blank slate that is the physical world.

The text itself links Moshe’s death at the end of *Chamishah Chumshei Torah* with its opening episode of Maaseh Bereishit, the creation story. In these last two *pesukim* of *VeZot Habrachah*, the verb “עשה” is used twice to describe Moshe’s leadership. It appears in pasuk 11, “אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח ה' וְלָכַח לְהַמּוֹרָא הַגְּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מִן־שָׁמַיִם לְבָנָיו כָּל־” and then again in pasuk 12 “וְיִשְׁרָאֵל”. The verb “עשה” also appears numerous times in the description of *Briyat Ha’olam* – appearing for the first time in 1:7 - “וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרְקִיעַ”. In differentiating between the verbs “עשה”, “יצר” and “ברא”, the Ramban<sup>51</sup> states that “יצר” is creation ex nihilo, “ברא” is the structuring of that initial matter into actual forms, and “עשה” is the taking of the finished creation and establishing it in its place, or fixing and preparing it, for its proper role. Moshe was in no way a creator – but his status as “angel” implies that he was someone who took God’s creations and “prepared them” for their role by pushing, pulling and prodding his people towards a closer relationship with their Creator through fulfillment of His will. He is leaving them now, but he is leaving them with the tools and experiences that they will need to encounter their future. Hence, we move from the end of the story, i.e. the accomplished, perfected “עושה” by Moshe at the end of Devarim, to the initial “עושה” of God’s will in creation. The verbal connection is as follows; in Bereishit, God creates the natural world and equips it for its future role, and in Devarim, Moshe has done the same for *Klal Yisrael*. In truth, both are examples of God’s desires impacting the physical world. In other words, both are examples of “angels.” God creates from scratch, and it is then our job to “נעשה”, to transform that creation and develop it towards perfection.

Moshe’s *prophetic* greatness was his ability to understand that the purpose of mankind lay in fulfilling God’s will. But as every prophet quickly discovered, there is only “so much” one can do in effecting actual change. The prophet may receive the message, but establishing that message depends on numerous factors of his audience; emotional reactions, physical desires and external events to name a few. Moshe the prophet, as we know, encountered quite often in the Jewish

<sup>51</sup> See the Ramban on Bereishit 1:7 and 1:26 as well as here in Devarim 34:12. The Ramban’s final comment in Devarim is on the words “אשר עשה משה” in which he explains “עשה” as “רק הכין אותם” – “he had merely made them ready”.

people, the obstacles of human obstinacy to the will of God. His *angelic* greatness lay in the fact that despite these obstacles, God's will took place. The Heavens touched the earth.<sup>52</sup> Man acted as agent, as God's *shaliach*, on this world.<sup>53</sup>

**Moshe is granted angelic status by the *aggadot*, not because he was superhuman, but because as a human being, he was able to wholly accomplish a *shlichut* of the Divine will.** It is no wonder then that the Torah ends on the words “לעיני כל ישראל”. As a prophet, he experienced God's presence “פנים אל פנים”; but as an angel, he was able to bring that contact down so that humankind could experience it. He may have been a prophet like none other, but “לעיני כל ישראל” is the testament to how he was able to use his greatness to activate God's will by effecting an entire society. For through Moshe's agency, *Am Yisrael* saw and experienced God's Presence, and was changed, transformed and renewed by it. And if each angel exists only to fulfill its particular mission, then Moshe's death at the end of our *parsha* is a significant symbol that his mission was complete and that his people were ready for their future.

“...ולכל המורא הגדול אשר עשה משה לעיני כל ישראל...בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ...” – what better way to celebrate the joy of the day than to pay tribute to the life and death of Moshe Rabbeinu ... and then to flip the pages back to the renewal of his mission, and of our mission; to close the gap between heaven and earth by, as prophets, working to recognize God, and as angels, striving to do His will.

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<sup>52</sup> In fact, *Am Yisrael* too experienced the roles of both angel and prophet. At the splitting of the Red Sea, all of *Klal Yisrael* became prophets (Mechilta, Beshalach 3), and at Har Sinai, the nation was considered to be on the level of the angels. To be termed prophet, one must have an elevated understanding of God. To be termed angel, one is playing an all-encompassing part in accomplishing a mission, a *shlichut*, of Hashem. At the sea, the nation “saw” God, they experienced Him, and they understood that He was their Father, their Savior and their Creator. They reached the level of prophets. At Har Sinai, however, they are described as angels, because as we accepted the *ol* of Torah, each Jew became an agent, sent on a mission.

<sup>53</sup> Or, as Rav Soloveitchik (*Ethical Man*, p184) points out, that in reality, this is a new aspect of the covenant introduced at Har Sinai; the fact that “... the covenant not only involves God in the human historical occurrence of His chosen people, but **draws man into the historical divine performance**. God wanders with His chosen friend or friends, and shares in their destiny. **Man coordinates his activities with divine planning and co-participates in the realization of great promise.**”